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A Mother's Memoirs, Concluded

By Morrie Mullins

Mother Dariana shares her final observations about her life, what she's seen, and what she hopes for the future of the galaxy. What makes them so final? Find out in this Living Force supplement.

Twice, Mother Dariana of the Hiironi has allowed researchers to ask her questions to record her thoughts about and experiences in Cularin. She agreed, last week, to what she refers to as "one final session." Those involved in the process expressed concern; their concern elicited only the gentlest of smiles from the ancient Mother. From behind eyes shrouded by wrinkles that decades ago grew their own wrinkles, Dariana let the moment pass. There could be no doubt that their concern touched her, nor could there be any doubt that, at least for the moment, she intended to say nothing further on the topic.

I had told them this would be the last of our talks. Even before I saw the machines with all their flashing lights and their scrolling, blinking numbers, I had told them. Because I remembered. I remembered the sense of the unfamiliar that came with those machines. Wondrous as I find them, remarkable as they are, that they will record for a thousand, thousand years what would have been passed down by my children for generations. And I remembered thinking, more than once, that such perfect recordings could never serve to teach. Not truly. Because what is learned, if the lessons come from so far in the past? When mothers teach daughters the lessons their own mothers taught, the lessons change. The learner has become the master, but the master is not the same person the learner once was. Much has been forgotten. More has been learned than the lesson itself. The galaxy has changed around the learner, and so when the lesson is taught once more -- decades later -- the meaning of the lesson cannot be the same.

These words will ever be the same, though. What I say today, to this box.

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A gentle tapping noise, then the bumping of a long nail being dragged across the face of the recorder.

What I say to this box will sound the same in a thousand years as it does today. And I wonder whether the things of which I speak will retain any meaning. Will my words bring insight, or confusion?

If you ask my children, they may tell you that this has ever been the question. Do my words bring insight, or do they bring confusion? But there are words, and there are the words beneath them. And the words beneath, they are what matter. I speak, and you hear, and later -- perhaps much later -- my

meaning may come clear to you. Or, rather, the meaning you assign to my words becomes clear.

And when I think that, I think perhaps my words may still bring something to the galaxy. Assuming my words survive. Assuming the galaxy survives.

This will be my last time to speak to the flashing, beeping box. Not because I am dying. Because I am comfortable with the box. I am comfortable with speaking to the thing that is not one of my children, can never be one of my children. So I must step back. Step away. I must return to the teaching of those who wish to be taught, those who it is right for me to teach. My children on Cularin must be my priority. The rest of the galaxy - - if I had more years than the stars, I might never teach all of them well enough. But for my children of the jungle, I will always be present.

I should talk about endings. Because this is the end of my use of the recording box, and because many other things are ending. The galaxy will not end - - the galaxy never does, it has neither beginnings nor endings, it simply is - - but much that we know will end.

And no, this is not an old Mother's way of speaking obliquely of her own death. Death has walked the jungle paths with me for years. Sometimes beside me, sometimes behind me, sometimes close enough that I could smell its cold breath. You do not see so many turnings of the suns without knowing death, without moving past your ability to fear it, to see it as anything other than a natural part of how things are.

I will die. We will all die. Whether I die tomorrow or in ten years matters not.

My own mother's passing was slow. Death walked with her for years. Not beside her, not behind her. With her. It held her hand. When she lay down to sleep, death lay beside her. I watched her - - living, still decaying - - and wished to help.

She saw me watching her. Felt me wishing. Waited. Spoke to me in tones one would use with a daughter not yet fully grown, though I was as adult as I felt I needed to be.

Still, when I looked at her, I felt the child she viewed me as. I felt lost. Afraid. I felt the loneliness that would come, when she had gone.

One day, as I sat beside her pallet in the hut she kept at the northern edge of the ch'hala grove, she looked at me and spoke.

"Daughter?" she said.

I don't remember my words. Mine were not the important ones being said.

"Do you grieve?"

I did. There was no hiding my grieving. Grief cuts sharper than stalks of kuvu grass left too long in the light of the suns, and I know my grief bled from every pore. And why not grieve? She was my mother. I expected her to admonish me, to tell me that grieving was wrong. Death is the will of the

Force, and all things come to it, and - - well, many of the things I've spoken so far into the box.

She did not say any of these things. "Thank you," she said. "Thank you."

I asked her why she would thank me when we both knew the truth of death. Becoming one with the Force is a completing of who we are.

"Because," she said, and I remember her voice being so tired, so broken, that it seemed to melt away from her, "it is the grieving that lets us remember. It is what makes us alive. Different from the trees. From the kilassin. They are part of the Force. They are tied to the galaxy just as we are. But when a tree falls in the forest, the other trees do not weep. They grow, they stretch their roots into the earth where the fallen tree once drew its nourishment, they eat hungrily at the sunlight and drink thirstily of the water. When a kilassin dies, other kilassin do not grieve."

I later saw a grieving kilassin, but only once, and suspect it was not typical of its kind. But I had not, when my mother was speaking, and would not have interrupted to correct her if I had.

"The other kilassin are more likely to leave their dead to rot - - or, if they are the great toothy ones, devour their dead themselves. But no grieving.

"Our ability to grieve," and her voice hurt her, I could tell, and it hurt me to hear her in pain, "is what ties us most strongly to the Force. It is the wondrous web of life, daughter. We know it for what it is. We do not forget it. We see the life that is part of the Force, and remember that which has already gone to join the Force. Just as you will remember me. Just as others will remember you when you have gone."

There are many lessons I could impart to this strange, blinking box. But the words would be no greater, nor any more true, for my having said them. The lessons I would teach are ones that those who take the time to listen - - to do more than just listen, indeed, who take the time to hear - - do not need to be taught.

Reminded, perhaps. But in the end, we are all one with the Force. All knowledge is at our fingertips. We need only be reminded to reach... to grasp. .. and to know.